

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A device for holding a sheetlike article on a movable underlying surface for transporting the sheetlike article at least in one direction selected from the group thereof consisting of a direction into and a direction out of an operating station having printing heads, the device comprising:

a negative-pressure source;

a movable belt formed with through-passage holes, said belt having a surface underlying the sheetlike article, the sheetlike article being retainable by pneumatic pressure on said surface; and

a screening device disposed locally fixedly with respect to the operating station and having a throttle opening, said screening device serving for reducing an airflow in a region of the printing heads at least with respect to adjacent regions, the reduction in the airflow resulting from the

sheetlike article being held on said underlying surface, said screening device including:

a cover plate disposed beneath said belt, said cover plate formed with pass-through openings;

a sheet-like mesh formed with holes and disposed beneath said cover plate, the holes of said mesh being of such number and size to cause, as a result of flow resistance thereof, an adequate reduction in the airflow in the region of the printing heads; and

a virtually limited first suction chamber disposed beneath the region of the printing heads, said first suction chamber having termination edges extending transversely to a transporting direction of said movable belt and limiting said first suction chamber in a longitudinal direction of said movable belt, said first suction chamber being connected to said negative-pressure source via said throttle opening; and

further suction chambers connected to said negative-pressure source, said further suction chambers being located adjacent said first suction chamber and having a

greater negative pressure than that of said first suction chamber.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The holding and transporting device according to claim 1, wherein the printing heads are ink-jet heads.

Claims 3-6 (cancelled)

Claim 7 (currently amended): The holding and transporting device according to claim 6 1, wherein said cover plate covers said suction chambers and serves for guiding said belt.

Claim 8 (original): The holding and transporting device according to claim 7, wherein said mesh is connected to said cover plate.

Claim 9 (original): The holding and transporting device according to claim 8, wherein the connection of said mesh to said cover plate is a connection selected from the group thereof consisting of integral and releasable connections.

Claim 10 (original): The holding and transporting device according to claim 1, wherein said underlying surface is on a

continuous transport belt formed with holes around the length thereof and guidable in given sections by said cover plate.

Claim 11 (original): The holding and transporting device according to claim 1, wherein said pneumatic pressure is selected from the group thereof consisting of positive and negative pressures.

Claim 12 (previously presented): The holding and transporting device according to claim 1, wherein pass-through openings of said cover plate in the region of the printing heads have a smaller pass-through surface area than pass-through openings outside the region.

Claim 13 (previously presented): The holding and transporting device according to claim 1, wherein said mesh only applies in areas where the printing heads are located.

Claim 14 (new): An ink jet printing unit, comprising:

a movable belt formed with through-passage holes for holding a sheetlike article by suction action and transporting the sheetlike article;

a printing head disposed above said movable belt for printing the sheetlike article;

a virtually limited first suction chamber disposed beneath said movable belt and a region of said printing head, said first suction chamber having a screening device for reducing an airflow in the region of the printing head;

further suction chambers disposed adjacent said first suction chamber; and

a negative-pressure source connected to said first suction chamber and said further suction chambers for removing air present in said first suction chamber and said further suction chambers;

said further suction chambers having a greater negative pressure than that of said first suction chamber.